

# WYCOMBE FELL BELOW THEIR



Wycombe's Brian Lee . . .  
a track-suit manager

**A**NY list of the most articulate managers in amateur football would have to include Brian Lee, boss of Wycombe Wanderers in his spare time and director of Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre during his working week.

Add to that his duties as a Justice of the Peace, and you get the outline of a man active in many different roles and highly successful in all of them.

He is a track-suit manager who is also a cool intellectual, able to talk fluently and persuasively on almost any subject. But he was not able to talk Wycombe into retaining the Isthmian League Championship, which they surrendered to Hendon last season.

After four successful seasons, in which they twice won the Isthmian title and often played with a brilliance that stamped them as the best amateur team in England, *Wycombe have fallen short of their own high standards.*

Although finishing high in the league table, they had several bad lapses on their own Loakes Park pitch, including an embarrassing defeat by

Cheshunt in the first round of the Amateur Cup.

Lee could not please all the fans all the time, but he took the setbacks without tantrums. "I try to take things philosophically," he said. "I don't get too elated when we win or too depressed when we lose."

With no professional clubs in Buckinghamshire, Wycombe have one of the largest and most loyal followings in amateur Soccer. The trouble is they are so conditioned by success that they do not take kindly to any loss of form lasting longer than a week or two.

Wycombe began like lions, winning their first seven matches without conceding a goal, but then they lost the goalscoring touch and against the background of a mounting injury list they had to struggle to beat even poor opposition.

Lee commented: "My difficulty was trying to motivate players who had done it all before. Once they started missing chances they began to worry and the mood of frustration was carried from one match to the next.

"We probably created more



# OWN HIGH STANDARDS says MIKE MELANIPHY

chances than the previous season, when we won the Isthmian Championship, but we didn't score so many goals and this didn't please supporters who have seen us crush most teams at Loakes Park."

Injuries prevented Wycombe from fielding an unchanged team more than three weeks running. The worst blows came when goalkeeper John Maskell broke a shoulder, and skipper John Delaney injured a leg.

Maskell, in his ninth season with Wycombe, regained his place and is rated by Lee as "the best uncapped amateur goalkeeper in the country." Delaney came back, too, and remains the best header of a ball in the amateur game.

While their scoring rate was down, Wycombe did not concede many either. Defenders Ian Rundle, also in his ninth year with the club, Dave Bullock and Derek Gamblin had a lot to do with this.

Larry Pritchard, a fine ball-player, had a good season in midfield, with strong support from Rob Williams and John Hutchinson.

The strikers gave Lee prob-

lems, though Tony Horseman called off his retirement plans and scored over 20 goals. Tony Amos was top marksman, though Brian Langfield and Keith Searle were in brilliant form at times.

Perhaps Wycombe's greatest hope for the future is Ken Swain, a 22-year-old forward discovered by Lee in college Soccer. Lee's verdict: "He has the skill and speed to become another Steve Heighway."

Swain was one of the bright spots in Wycombe's disappointing season, although many clubs would have been more than happy to have done as well as the Bucks giants.

However, their boss is confident that they will be back to their winning ways very soon.

Lee is also hopeful about the future of the Isthmian League, now that the decision has been taken to start a second division with promotion and relegation next season.

He said: "The league must be given more importance. We have to get rid of the feeling that once a club is out of the Amateur Cup the season is finished.

"It is wrong to base team policy on winning a cup, when the league should be the club's bread and butter. Overall standards would improve if more clubs accepted this."

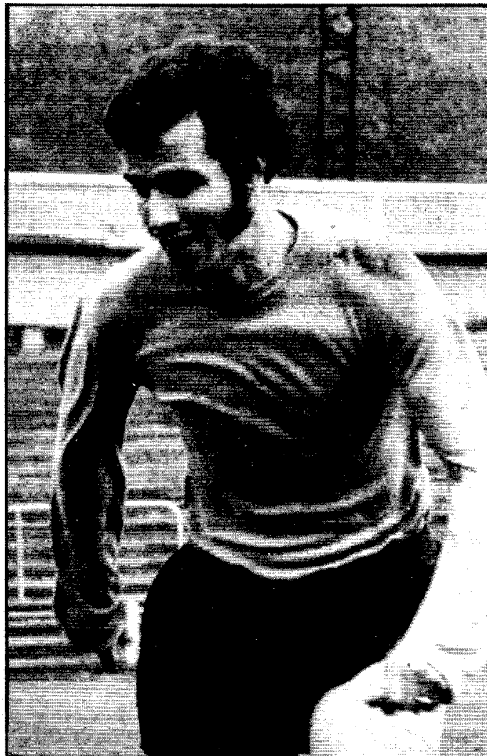
Lee would also like to see players under contract to clubs, even before the amateur status is scrapped at the end of next season.

"Club-hopping brings the game into disrepute," he said. "It would be better if players were committed to stay with a club for a season."

The standard of refereeing does not please Lee. His view: "I would like to see the Isthmians have exclusive use of a panel of referees and linesmen. We would have more control over them and could bring them up to the same standard.

"I think it might be a good idea to have them work regularly together in units of three, taking it in turn to be referee. Uniform standards must be the target."

Like so much that Lee has to say on Soccer, the idea is worth an airing at league official level.



The Wanderers line-up before their match with Bromley, back row first: Ian Rundle, Tony Horseman, goalkeeper John Maskell, Derek Gamblin, Paul Birdseye, Larry Pritchard, Dave Bullock. Front: Mick Holifield, Alan Gane, Tony Amos, John Delaney (capt.), and Brian Langfield. And right alongside there's striker Keith Searle